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REPORT

OF THE REV. GEORGE C. BECKWITH'S AGENCY IN BEHALF OF THE
AMERICAN PEACE SOCIETY.

FROM our last anniversary, I proceeded anew to the labors of my agency, and have had, through a kind providence, strength and opportunity to preach every Sabbath but one during the year. One I spent in Newark, N. J., and all the rest in New England. I have been more or less in every one of its States, and travelled about five thousand miles. I have occasionally preached and lectured seven or eight times in a week, and, on an average, about four times a week during the whole year, beside discourses on other parts of the gospel, and addresses to Sabbath schools, at peace prayer-meetings, and upon other occasions.

General reception. I have almost uniformly met a kind and cordial reception. I do not recollect more than one minister of the gospel who showed himself unfriendly to our cause; and even he would not have refused me his pulpit, had it not been preëngaged, nor probably cherished any feelings of hostility or displeasure, but for the misconceptions into which he had been led respecting our principles and aims. I have found easy access to the pulpits of no less than nine religious denominations, and had nearly all the facilities I could desire for addressing every class in the Christian community. The pulpit, the Sabbath school, our seminaries of learning from the highest to the lowest, the periodical press, all the main channels of communication with the religious public, have been opened to me with little hesitation or reserve. I feel under obligation to my brethren of every name, for the kindness with which they have welcomed your agent and our cause.

State of the public mind. I have found the religious community much better prepared than I could have expected, for appeals in behalf of this enterprise. To nearly nine congregations in ten, the subject, as a distinct department of Christian benevolence and reform, was quite new; but, though they had read little, and heard less, they pretty uniformly lent a candid, favorable ear, and seemed to take an unexpected degree of interest. There is much apathy, but still a predisposition to entertain the claims of peace. The public mind is generally a blank, yet ready to receive a just and deep impression of this subject. God has strikingly prepared the people of New England, the scene of my labors, to welcome the cause of peace as an element of the gospel, and a part of the great moral machinery requisite for the world's speedy and thorough conversion; and, in this section of our country, there is now needed only the blessing of God upon the right use of the means he has appointed for the spread of pacific principles co-extensive with Christianity. The public mind here is apparently ripe for such means; and this calls aloud upon the friends of peace for a more extended and energetic system of agencies, publications and other instrumentalities to bring public opinion throughout New England into practical accordance with the gospel on this momentous subject.

Ecclesiastical bodies. I have been present, in behalf of our society, at the meeting of the General Associations of Congregational and Presbyterian ministers in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, at each of which, addresses were made on the subject of peace, and resolutions adopted commending the cause to the special attention of ministers, and to the prayers and patronage of the Christian community. The subject was also brought before the General Association or Conference of Congregational ministers and churches in every State in New England, and similar resolves passed in favor of our cause. The same has been done by the highest ecclesiastical bodies connected with the leading denominations in New England; and we may regard the general voice of Christians here as decided in support of the enterprise to which we are devoted. I could not fail to observe at these meetings an increase of interest in the cause, and a growing conviction of its importance, and of the obligation resting on the followers of the Prince of peace to sustain it with more union and vigor.

Literary institutions. Our main hope must rest, under God, upon the nurseries of youthful character; and all these I have found peculiarly favorable to our cause. I have lectured eighteen times before colleges in New England, and addressed fifteen or twenty academies and high schools for both sexes. No where have I met with persons so open to conviction, or so susceptible of deep and just impressions on this subject, as among the select minds training in our literary institutions for future usefulness. Some of these institutions have already become, and all of them, I trust, will ere-long become, nurseries of peace, and send forth through the community the best and strongest influences in favor of our cause. In all the colleges I visited, peace societies, I believe, have been organized where none existed before; and some of them started under auspices highly encouraging. The society in Middlebury College embraced nine-tenths of the students, and in the other colleges, a very respectable proportion.

I should be glad to mention a variety of facts relative to the cause of peace in our seminaries of learning, and under the other topics briefly presented in this report; but, however interesting or important I might deem such facts, the ordinary limits of a communication like this, will not allow me to give them in detail.

Periodical press. I have found easy access to the public mind through the religious press. I have spent no small part of the intervals between my public labors in writing on the subject of peace for newspapers, and other periodicals. In this way more than fifty articles have come before the public, and probably reached two or three hundred thousand minds.

Of how much ultimate use such appeals through the press will be, I cannot say; but I think there is much reason to hope for results of permanent importance to the cause. The subject is now afloat in the community; the public eye is turned to it as an object of general interest; and every blow struck will be likely to produce much greater and more enduring effects, than the same efforts would have done thirty years ago. The public mind is in a state of transition, and ought to be watched with wise and ceaseless care. We need sentinels through the land; and, had we a prompt and skilful pen of some power, near every religious print, to seize on passing events

connected more or less with our cause, to obviate the misconceptions and prejudices that occasionally appear in most of our periodicals, and to press its claims week after week, from one month or quarter to another, upon the public mind, services like these would doubtless prove extremely useful. Our friends are multiplying in every direction; and I cannot refrain from the hope and belief, that such advocates will ere-long be found in all parts of our land.

Organizations. I have not aimed at the formation of peace societies, except in our colleges; and, where no society already existed, a train was started which has, I believe, led to the organization of an auxiliary in every one of them. Of these auxiliaries I have full and certain information from only two or three; and in each of these I learn that a considerable proportion of the students had become members, and that the prospects of the cause among them were more encouraging than I had ventured to hope.

I could easily have organized scores of peace societies; but I fully acquiesce in the opinion of the parent society, that it is not wise to *force* such organizations into existence, or even to encourage them where there is not a sufficient degree of spontaneous and deep-seated interest to sustain them with vigor. I have thought best to throw the leaven into the public mind, and let it work in its own way; to scatter the seeds of peace with as little noise or parade as possible, and leave them to spring up under the dews of heaven, and bring forth their appropriate fruits. I trust we shall eventually reap a rich harvest, especially from the seed sown in the churches, those moral gardens which God has reclaimed from the world's wide and dreary waste. Christians are generally too little informed to take any intelligent and decided stand on the *distinguishing* principles of peace; but I think not, a few churches will be prepared ere-long for such a step, and will then do more than any separate organizations could to clinch the nail which the friends of peace are now trying to drive.

Funds. My main object has been, as you well know, to interest the Christian public in the subject of peace as a part of the gospel; but I have generally tendered to our friends an opportunity of rendering us such aid as they were spontaneously inclined to give. I have received but little in comparison with what we need, or what the cause deserves, yet more than could have been reasonably expected under all the circumstances of the case. The people, where I have been, generally knew next to nothing of the object as a distinct department of Christian benevolence and reform. I have spent most of the time in those sections of the country from which the largest contributions are rarely received by any of our charitable institutions; I have visited only two of the secondary cities in New England, and those under circumstances which forbade any special efforts to obtain funds; and the general pressure felt more or less through the year, has rendered it extremely difficult to raise money even for those societies to which the whole church has so long been pledged. In view of such facts, I have been gratefully disappointed in receiving for our cause so large an amount as I have.

I have been gratified with the disposition of congregations to make their pastors members of our society for life. I have received the sums requisite for fifteen such memberships, with the promise of ten more, and I cannot but hope that such examples will be ex-

tensively, if not universally imitated in our churches of every name. It can in nine cases out of ten be done with great ease; and, if some friend of our cause, whether male or female, will just start the matter in earnest, it will pretty certainly be accomplished to the gratification of all concerned.

I have in almost every place perceived the effect of what the pastor had done, or neglected to do, in behalf of our cause. If he had given it his sanction by preaching upon the subject himself, they have, without any exception that I now recollect, been ready to receive me with favor, and respond to my call for pecuniary aid; but, if he had never brought this part of the gospel before them in any distinct form, I could hardly expect them to hear me without some mixture of distrust, much less to contribute with liberality or cheerfulness. Pastors must themselves take hold of this cause, before their people will come to its aid; but I deem it quite certain, that the latter will not linger long or far in the rear of the former.

I have met with some cheering instances of liberality to our cause. In a country town, where I had spent the Sabbath, I received, on Monday morning, a request to visit a good brother of the Baptist church, confined to his house by a lingering illness. I went; and, on entering his chamber, I found him sinking in consumption. He was too feeble to converse much, but rallied strength enough to inquire after the progress and prospects of our cause, and to relate the manner of his becoming so deeply interested in its behalf. He had several years before chanced to travel in company with Mr. Ladd; and "from him," said our friend, "I received an impression I shall never lose. I regard war as a mass of sin, as the worst of human evils; and I look upon the cause of peace as immensely important. I have long been waiting for an opportunity to aid it; and I thank God for sending you here at this time, as I may never have another chance." As a testimony of his interest in our cause, he gave me an order for *one hundred dollars*, and added, "if the Lord spares me, you may expect more."*

Pledges to preach. I deem it well nigh essential to the complete success of our enterprise, that peace should come up in the ordinary discussions of the pulpit as an element of the gospel; and I am happy to say, that I have found ministers almost universally willing to preach on the subject of peace. I might have procured hundreds of pledges more than I have; but, as we furnish ministers thus pledged with the organ of our society, I feared to burden ourselves beyond our means. Still, I think every possible effort should be made to procure funds for this cheap and efficient mode of extending the principles of peace. Every minister who will pledge himself to plead this cause once a year before his people, ought to be made sure of gratuitously receiving, if he wishes, the periodical of our society to assist him in performing this service with greater ease and effect.

* Since writing the paragraph above, I learn through the public prints, that THOMAS W. TOLLMAN, of Randolph, Mass., died not many weeks after I saw him. "Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God." Matt. 5: 9. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." Rev. 14: 13.

Progress of pacific principles. I think the principles of peace are spreading silently, yet extensively in the community. The leaven has not been at work long enough, in most cases, to produce its full effects; but I have seen enough to learn how it is working, and I feel confident that our cause is surely and steadily advancing.

I will give you a single specimen. In a town somewhat secluded, I spent part of a Sabbath, and went during the week to address the lyceum and the academy on other aspects of this great subject. I did not, in my sermon, or either of my addresses, agitate the question concerning the lawfulness of wars strictly defensive, but left it, with a few leading hints, for the people to examine and settle at their leisure. The lyceum took the lion by his beard, and discussed the question, whether war in any case is justifiable on the principles of the gospel; and, after a long and animated debate, a vote, as usual with them, was taken on the merits of the case, and every member, except one, gave his voice against all war as inconsistent with Christianity.

Need of efforts. The grand desideratum for our cause is effort. We cannot expect the spread of pacific principles without appropriate means; but God is ready to bless such means, and the Christian community to feel their speedy influence in revolutionizing the war sentiments of Christendom. With two or three laborers in this immense field, with a few hundreds of dollars, and a few thousands of tracts, we cannot dream of moving a whole nation; and the cause demands in this country at least one agent for every State, and twenty or thirty thousand dollars for the present year. Even such a scale of efforts, though more than ten times as great as in past years, would not equal by half the labors and expenditures in some other enterprises of Christian reform. Let as much be done for peace, as has been for temperance or anti-slavery, and I should confidently anticipate a speedy and thorough change of public opinion concerning this master-sin and scourge of our world.

Publications on peace. I have found an increasing demand for publications on peace, and could easily have secured the circulation of a large number to good purpose. I have by direction published 1000 of the *Solemn Review*, 2000 of the *Solemn Appeal*, 10,000 of the *Sketch of War*, and nearly 10,000 of *Peace Societies*; in all nearly 23,000, the greater part of which are already in circulation.

When unable to procure enough of our own publications for my use, I obtained 800 copies of the tract published by the American Tract Society on peace, and circulated most of them. I have also distributed 50 copies of *Stories for Children*, 110 of the *Address to Ladies*, 90 of the small tracts of the London Peace Society, and a considerable number of their large tracts; nearly 600 of *War unchristian* by the Connecticut Peace Society, and about 70 of their tract on the *Moral Dignity of the Peace Enterprise*. I have likewise put in circulation some hundreds of the *Friend of Peace* furnished me by the Rev. Dr. WORCESTER, the venerable patriarch of the peace cause in this country, and given to leading individuals, or to peace societies in literary institutions about 40 volumes on the subject of peace.

I cannot tell the exact number of publications, large and small, I have been enabled to get into circulation during the year; but I think it cannot fall much, if it all below 20,000. This number is much in

advance of former years, yet trifling in comparison with what the cause demands; and, had there been such a system as we *must* ere-long have, I could easily have established small depositories of our publications in a number of somewhat central and important places. In a few instances I tried to do so; but it was an experiment from which I hope for little permanent benefit without a better organization of this department at the centre,—an improvement which I confidently expect to see very soon.

ARTICLE V.

REV. MR. BECKWITH'S ADDRESS,

ON THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO REMOVE THE DISGRACE BROUGHT UPON OUR RELIGION BY THE WARS OF CHRISTENDOM.

MR. PRESIDENT,—I rise with unfeigned sorrow to offer a sentiment which may seem to cast censure on the great body of Christians through the world; but duty, always paramount to every other consideration, plainly requires us to acknowledge the guilt in which the custom of war has involved the church of Christ, and to unite our best endeavors for the removal of this stain from the sacred name we bear. I stand not here a willing accuser of my brethren; but, having been ourselves more or less under a sort of military mania, having from our childhood inhaled the moral malaria of war, I deem it high time for us, along with all the disciples of the Prince of peace, to put in practice the resolution I have the honor to move in these words,—*that Christians are bound by the strongest and most sacred obligations to remove the DISGRACE which the wars of Christendom have brought upon their religion.*

You perceive, Sir, that this resolution embraces several points of vital importance,—*the fact that the wars of nations nominally Christian HAVE disgraced our religion; the ability of Christians, if they will, to remove this disgrace; and the pressure of obligation upon them to use the means requisite for this purpose.*

The stigma of war, Sir, was branded upon Christianity by human hands. Once she was entirely free from this stain, and caught it first from her unhallowed and fatal union with the state. Neither Christ, nor his apostles, nor any of his early disciples, ever lent the slightest countenance to the custom of war. So long as the gospel was received in its primitive simplicity, and the lamp of piety burnt pure and bright in the church, Christians no more thought of becoming soldiers than we should of turning pirates at the permission or command of our government; but, remaining one after another in the army after their conversion, and seduced at length into alliance with the state under Constantine the Great, the followers of the Prince of peace—a lamentable proof of their degeneracy—no longer saw the glaring inconsistency of war with their religion, and